

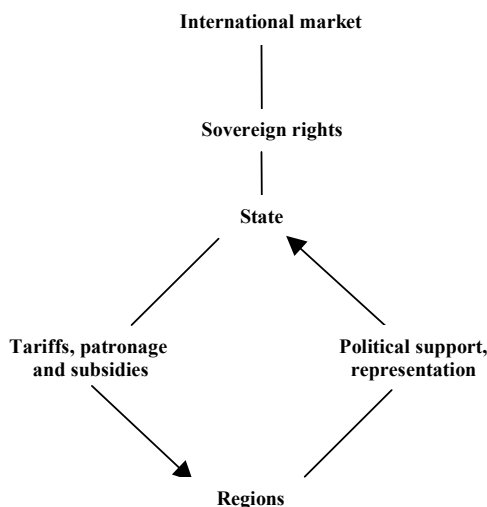
## EUROPE OF THE REGIONS, EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY AND BELARUS: IN SEARCH OF A ROADMAP

### 1. EU regional policy and the new roles of the regions

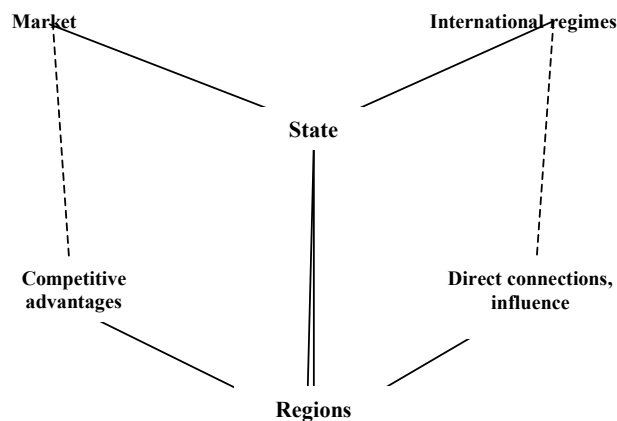
Regional policy (RP) of the European Union is in the process of transformation of its initial goals and its essence. It implies a new and active role of the regions. As stressed by a German researcher Peter Frankenfeld, “he who wants to understand the essence of regional policy correctly and in today's spirit and he who wants to apply it correctly should abandon the perception of regional economy and regional economic policy as predominantly a way of compensating for its drawbacks. We are dealing largely with the perception of regional economy in a broader sense, namely as a comprehensive policy of development and competition”.<sup>1</sup>

A British researcher Michael Keating pays attention to important differences in relations between the regions, global markets, international regimes and the state in the traditional and globalized forms of territorial governance. In the traditional forms they are mediated by the state. Regions serve as a political support of states and governments and are represented in state policy. In return, the state provides patronage and subsidies (see **Figure 1**). This mutual exchange was disrupted by globalization, European integration and development of the market. Regions become a new space for making policy as systems of interaction and autonomous participants in the global order. States lose their mediation monopoly and ability to control their own spatial economies, while regions develop direct ties with international regimes and the global market. The position of regions in the international market depends not only on political representation channels, but also on the competitive advantages and ability to use them efficiently (see **Figure 2**).<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1. State and regions:  
Traditional order**



**Figure 2. Regions, state and market**



In the context of European integration and gradual enlargement of the EU, internal interregional groups turn into the “engines of integration,” and international cooperation, including the outer perimeter of the Union borders, comes to the foreground. In the second half of 1980's the European Union developed the first program to promote transborder cooperation of the regions, which have common borders – INTERREG-I that was in operation in 1990-1993. INTERREG-II (1994-1999), in addition to the previous tasks, included also development of transnational energy networks and transnational cooperation on regional planning and development. INTERREG-III (2000-2006) was designed to foster transborder, transnational and transregional cooperation. Its subsection INTERREG-III B – “transnational cooperation” – covers territories of states, which directly border on the EU, as well as a number of territories in the basins of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

### 2. Belarus in the region and the world: geopolitical self-identification of the official Minsk

<sup>1</sup> Frankenfeld, Peter. Regional'naja politika Jevropejskogo sojuza i posledstvija rasshirenija ES na Vostok [Regional Policy of the European Union and its Consequences for EU Enlargement to the East]. In Russian. Report presented on 11 December 2000 at the High School of Pforzheim, FRG.

<sup>2</sup> Keating, Michael. Novyj regionalizm v Zapadnoj Jevrope [New regionalism in Western Europe]. In Russian // *Logos*. 2003. No. 6. Pp. 85-86.

As the below content sample shows (**Table 1**), the dominant official political discourses, constructing the respective images and roles of Belarus, are very contradictory. Formally, they stress its autonomy in regional, European and global politics. At the same time, there is an obvious tilt toward the Russian gravity center. Also evident is a very broad multi-functionality of roles, redundant and unattainable by definition.<sup>3</sup> It seems that at this stage it would be correct to speak about a number of geopolitical proto-images that may be used in the future for the development of the real geopolitical identity of the Belarusian state (or in spite of it).

**Table 1. Content of official Belarusian geopolitical discourses**

<p><b>1. REGION: autonomous regional geopolitical (proto)-nucleus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A "center of Eastern Slavonic civilization"</li> <li>• "Strong and prosperous Belarus with its unique model of political and socio-economic development"</li> <li>• One of the strongest state in Europe as regards its armed forces</li> <li>• A "model" for Europe, Russian and all Eurasia</li> <li>• A "cosmic power" (also at the global level)</li> </ul> <p><u>Meanwhile:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It plays an autonomous role beyond the classical "center-periphery" dichotomy ("Belarus is located in the centre of Europe and is an integral part of Europe")</li> </ul> <p><u>Meanwhile:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is located between two geostrategic "monsters": the EU and Russia</li> <li>• A "transit bridge" between the East and the West</li> <li>• A "transit guarantor", thanks to which the EU receives energy resources</li> <li>• A "barrier", protecting the EU against transnational threats, on one side</li> <li>• An "outpost" of Russia protecting it from the West, on the other side</li> </ul> <p><u>Meanwhile:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The EU can be perceived as a "threat" not only to the political regime, but to the Belarusian state itself (if they are equated to one another)</li> <li>• Belarus is an equal member of the Union State, which does not recognize the division into the "senior" and the "junior"</li> </ul> <p><b>2. EURASIA: a leader of Eurasian integration groups</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Of the Belarusian-Russian union</li> <li>• Of EurAsEC (previously of the CIS), as well as of the political and military alliance the Organization of the Collective Security Treaty</li> </ul> <p><b>3. GLOBE: a leader of "anti-globalism"</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An active member of the Non-Allied movement</li> <li>• An active member of the "anti-hegemonistic front"</li> </ul>
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It is known that images can be inadequate and, more to that do not equal realistic and effective strategies. At the moment, we can observe the principally different vectors of development of the European and Belarusian political systems and concepts (*politeas*): in the first case, this is "de-territorialization," "de-sovereignization," and decentralization of the European space, while in the second it is an active nation- and state- building, a rigid spatial "territorialization," centralization and division according to the *self/other* principle.<sup>4</sup> In other words, we deal with different paradigms of modernity: modern (Westphalian) and post-

<sup>3</sup> Analysts paid attention to this Belarusian geopolitical tradition long time ago. See, in particular: Yakovlevsky, Roman. "Ustoichivye geopoliticheskiye grezy" [Stable geopolitical dreams]. In Russian // *Izvestija*. 09.08.2002. P. 8.

<sup>4</sup> In our opinion, Belarus is currently developing along the "modern state" trajectory and corresponds to the territorial-political model of a "power container," conceptualized by Anthony Giddens and Peter J. Taylor. See: Giddens, Anthony. *The Nation-State and Violence*. - Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985 and Taylor, P. J. *The state as container: territoriality in the modern world-system* // *Progress in Human Geography*. 1994. Vol.18. Pp. 151-62.

modern (post-Westphalian) with their inherent differences both on territoriality and space.<sup>5</sup> Monocentrism of the authoritarian power learns polycentrism of network governance with incredible difficulties.

### **3. Belarus and the European Neighbourhood Policy: words without deeds**

As stated officially, "based on the principles of good-neighborly relations, Belarus is involved in transborder cooperation aimed at developing and implementing joint projects among local government bodies, non-governmental and private institutions in the crossborder areas of the neighboring countries. Its major objective is to transform the state border from a dividing line into a place of cooperation between the neighboring nations... Belarus considers creation and functioning of the Euroregions as the basic and most comprehensive form of transborder cooperation..."<sup>6</sup>

Four Euroregions have been set up on EU borders with Belarus' participation: the Euroregion "Bug" (1995), embracing the Brest Oblast of Belarus and the border areas of Poland and Ukraine; the Euroregion "Neman" (1997), bringing together the Hrodna Oblast of Belarus, the border areas of Poland and Lithuania, and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation; the Euroregion "Azerny Krai" ("The Land of Lakes", 1998), uniting several rayons of the Vitebsk Oblast, and the border areas of Latvia and Lithuania); and the Euroregion "Belovezhskaya Pushcha" (2002), encompassing several rayons of the Hrodna and the Brest Oblasts of Belarus and the border areas of Poland. Another Euroregion – "Dnepr" (2003), is uniting the Homel Oblast of Belarus and the border areas of Russia and Ukraine.

Belarus' participation in the activities of the Euroregions is very limited. Thus, for example, the Euroregion "Bug" has, in fact, turned into a bilateral Polish-Ukrainian project.<sup>7</sup> Its involvement in the European regions "Neman" and "The Land of Lakes" has never been active. Belarusian partners either demonstrate a low interest in such activities or do not guarantee that the approved international projects will be supported inside the country.<sup>8</sup> A bilateral intergovernmental agreement on the main principles of crossborder cooperation between Lithuania and Belarus was signed only in June 2006.<sup>9</sup>

Joint work in the tripartite Belarusian-Ukrainian-Russian European region "Dnepr", created on the initiative of the Belarusian side, is rather formal and shows no obvious results (save sporadic meetings at the official level and some scientific conferences).

Unlike Belarus, all of its neighboring EU and CIS member-states have acceded to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (ECTC). For example, it entered into force for Ukraine in 1993, for Moldova in 2000, and for the Russian Federation in 2003. The participants in the Convention are currently at different stages of signing or preparation for signing of the Additional Protocol and Protocol No. 2 to this document, which open additional opportunities for interregional and transborder relations between local actors.

Similar is the situation with the European Charter of Local Self-Government of the Council of Europe (1985), which endorsed and enhanced the provisions of the ECTC. It has come into effect for Ukraine, Moldova and the Russian Federation in 1998. Belarus has not signed it yet.

Accession of Belarus to the above documents is possible, even without it being member of the Council of Europe (This country was not member of the CoE. Following the November 1996 referendum in Belarus the latter was deprived of a "special-guest" status in January 1997).

Today, five oblasts (out of six) and forty-four rayons (or 2/5 of all of these local administrative units) share a common border with the neighboring states – Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Ukraine. Only the Minsk Oblast is not bordering foreign states. While the borders with Russia and Ukraine remain relatively open, the situation on borderlands with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia is quite different. Border and visa regimes between Belarus and Poland had existed before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Their emergence between Belarus, Lithuania and Latvia caused a significant reduction in various interregional exchanges. As stressed by the UNDP National Human Development Report 2004-2005, in order to improve Belarus' participation in crossborder partnership programs, "it is critical to fully restore and revitalize productive relations with the European Commission and other EU institutions, including on issues related to regional-level partnerships

<sup>5</sup> The differences of the concepts of territory and space in the paradigms of "modernism" and "post-modernism" see, for example: Ruggie, John Gerard. *Territoriality and Beyond // International Organization*. Vol.47. No. 1. Winter 1993. Also: Morozov V. E. "St. Petersburg between the territory and the space: methodological issues of links between theory and practice". Theses of the report presented at the Centre of Research and Educational Programs of the St. Petersburg Union of Scientists on October 30, 2002. [http://megaregion.narod.ru/stenogr\\_1.htm](http://megaregion.narod.ru/stenogr_1.htm)

<sup>6</sup> Official website of the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Belarus. <http://www.mfa.gov.by/rus/publications/issue/facts/2006/06.Economy.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See: Grajewski, Przemyslaw. "Belarus: The Unrecognised Challenge" // Dov Lynch (ed.). *Changing Belarus*. Chaillot Paper No. 85. - Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies (November 2005). Pp. 84-88.

<sup>8</sup> See: Maksimchik, Inna. Belarus derzhit pauzu [Belarus keeps a pause]. In Russian. <http://www.w-europe.org/?p=251>

<sup>9</sup> MIDy Litvy i Belarusi obsudjat otnoshenija Minska i ES [Foreign Ministries of Lithuania and Belarus will discuss Minsk-EU relations] In Russian. 02.06.2006. <http://www.charter97.org/bel/news/2006/06/02/mid>

between Belarus and the EU... A first step in this direction would be to develop – in partnership among the relevant Belarusian, Russian, Ukrainian and EU institutions – a set of common, transparent and equally acceptable legal norms governing crossborder trade, and participation in the Euroregions. This should eventually help reduce barriers to the movement of people, goods, capital and services across national boundaries."<sup>10</sup>

Belarus is objectively interested in fostering all spectrum of crossborder cooperation in the economic, cultural, educational and other fields at the international, national, regional and local levels. This may help to simplify the visa regime, support the development of the border, transport, energy, communication and nature preservation infrastructures, as well as to make more efficient combat with illegal migration and international crime. Crossborder and transborder cooperation could largely contribute to the revival of Belarus' depressed areas, which include small towns with unstable industrial enterprises and the rural communities formed around poorly performing agricultural farms. It could also mitigate regional inequalities and many social and economic disparities among the regions and among the regions and the center.<sup>11</sup>

One of the key starting measures along this way is to abandon overcentralization of power. The legal status of local government and self-government authorities is still regulated by the Law "On Local Government and Self-Government" of February 20, 1991,<sup>12</sup> which has become obsolete in principle. This fact illustrates qualitative differences of the processes of modification of the local government and self-government system in Belarus and respective reforms in the EU as a whole and in the neighboring states, in particular. Local authorities in Belarus are, *de facto*, subordinated to the President's power hierarchy. They have minimal financial autonomy and functional independence, are not protected by the legislation against excessive regulation by superior authorities and, therefore, are not in a position to utilize all capacities of the local communities, including the field of border and transborder cooperation.<sup>13</sup>

In March 2003, the European Union came up with the initiative "Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: New Framework for relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours." As part of this new policy, in July 2003 the Commission adopted the Communication "Paving the Way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument," which envisages the creation of a new instrument for dealing with the common challenges arising from proximity-related issues on external borders of the enlarged EU. This New Neighbouring Instrument (NNI) will support crossborder and regional or transnational cooperation along the external borders, combining both external policy objectives and economic and social cohesion. Its introduction is envisaged after 2006 on the basis of assessment of existing legal and budgetary issues. Over 2004-2006, work has been done to strengthen interaction between the existing mechanisms. To this end, Neighbourhood Programmes (NP) have been organized. They are developed either on the basis of the previous programs INTERREG or as absolutely new programs.<sup>14</sup>

For the period 2004-2006 some 23 million EURO are to be allocated to projects aimed at reinforcing crossborder cooperation between the enlarged EU and its new neighbor Belarus in the framework of three programs: "INTERREG-III A Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus (Priority South)", "Poland-Belarus-Ukraine INTERREG-III A/TACIS CBC", and "Region of the Baltic Sea INTERREG-III B."<sup>15</sup>

Additional opportunities are offered by the Neighbourhood Programme "Russia-Belarus," launched to promote institutional cooperation on a transnational basis and bilateral maritime cooperation across the Baltic Sea (the 9th Call for project applications has been open from July 20th until October 16th 2006). The planned activities will mainly take place in the territories of the partner states (Russia and Belarus) or will be for the benefit of these states as well as for the mutual benefit of both EU territory and partner countries. Since the EU external funding (TACIS) is not yet available for this program, the financial assistance (EUR 3,325,000) will be granted under the suspension clause.<sup>16</sup>

Belarus participation in the above-mentioned projects has encountered a number of serious problems; hence, their number is so far very small. The most serious barriers include the discrepancy between the quality of Belarusian partner applications and the established requirements (*inter alia*, due to technical complexity as

<sup>10</sup> Belarus: addressing imbalances in the economy and society. National Human Development Report 2004-2005. UNDP Office in the Republic of Belarus. - Minsk: "Altiora – Live Colours", 2005.

<sup>11</sup> See *Ibidem* for more details on regional disparities, overcentralization of power and excessive reglementation of the activities of NGO's, public associations and private business.

<sup>12</sup> See: Mestnoje upravljenje i samoupravljenje v Respublike Belarus [Local government and self-government in the Republic of Belarus]. In Russian.. <http://pravo.by/StateLaw/localcontrol.htm>

<sup>13</sup> More detailed information about problems of local government and self-government in Belarus see in: Fateev V. S. Regionalnaja politika: teorija i praktika [Regional Policy: theory and practice]. In Russian. – Minsk, EHU, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> See the European Neighbourhood Policy Website of the European Commission at: [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/index_en.htm)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.delbl.ec.europa.eu/page649.html>

<sup>16</sup> NEW Call for Proposals in the framework of the Neighbourhood Programme "Russia-Belarus." 07/25/2006. <http://www.delbl.ec.europa.eu/page2328.html> Previously Russian experts criticized the ENP for its alleged intent to "divorce" Russia and Belarus into different groups of states.

regards their preparation and registration), the difference of interests of potential partners in the neighboring states, and a complex, protracted and bureaucratic procedure of project approval on the Belarusian side (the need to bring them in compliance with several regulatory documents: the Decree of the President on the international technical support and the Instruction on technical support of the Council of Ministers). Besides, all projects must be endorsed by respective ministries and departments and by a special commission of the Council of Ministers on international technical support (provided no reservations have been made by ministries), after which the Prime Minister takes the final decision.

As a result, by now only a few from dozens of applications for the programs "INTERREG -III A Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus (Priority South)" and "Poland-Belarus-Ukraine INTERREG-III A/TACIS CBC" have been endorsed. At the same time, excessive duration of the procedure for endorsing applications in Belarus leads in some cases to a situation when foreign partners (who, as a rule, do not have procedural problems) prefer to stick to the established deadlines and obtain funds, at least, for themselves, while Belarusian colleagues miss their chance. To date, from about forty quite feasible projects within the above two programs, only about fifteen are being implemented. This explains also the fact that because of the lack of applications from the Belarusian side and small number of approved projects a long sequence of Calls (up to ten) for their consideration is announced.

As of September 2005, the Belarusian partners took part only in ten out of 101 approved projects within 1-7 Calls of the Neighbourhood Programme "Region of the Baltic Sea INTERREG-III B", while in January 2006, already 120 projects had been approved involving partners from all countries of the region. It is noteworthy that one of the projects with Belarus participation is specially targeted at enhancing and leveling the roles of European regions in integration processes, building the institutional capacity and including national authorities and international organizations into processes of planning and spatial development of the Euroregions.<sup>17</sup>

Speaking in December 2005 at a seminar on "Cooperation across the EU's Eastern External Borderline: the Launch of the Network of Eastern External Border Regions (NEEBOR)," Danuta Hübner, Member of the European Commission responsible for Regional Policy, stated that crossborder cooperation along the Eastern borders of the Union after 2007 will be fully supported by the new European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), under the responsibility of the European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Benita Ferrero-Waldner. The ENPI intends to provide a coherent approach to crossborder cooperation along the Eastern and Southern borders of the Union through financing various projects aimed at revitalizing crossborder economic activities and facilitating border crossing by ordinary people.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4. Not "new threats", but new opportunities: *in lieu* of a Conclusion**

EU foreign policy becomes all the more holistic. It combines different internal policies, which, in turn, acquire external parameters and are mutually coordinated: regional, immigration, visa and border policies, Police and Judicial Co-operation in Criminal matters (PJCC), policy in the field of fundamental rights and freedoms and a common foreign and security policy. In so doing, the ENP is not simply "regionalized" by the geographic principle, but also acquires characteristics of the internal regional policy of the EU.

With regard to Belarus the ENP is not working to the full. The country is only marginally participating in regional cooperation programs. Obviously, in its crossborder cooperation with EU member-states Belarus is "stuck" in between the 1st and 3rd possible models (see **Table 2**).

In the long run, it entails not only lagging behind the neighbors in gaining experience and broadening the scale of interaction, but, what is especially important, a slowdown in the solution of *common* problems requiring *joint* efforts.

**Table 2. Models, forms and areas of crossborder cooperation<sup>19</sup>**

<b>Model of crossborder cooperation</b>	<b>Possible forms of crossborder cooperation</b>	<b>Possible areas of crossborder cooperation</b>

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.bsrinterreg.net/programm/\\_downloads/2005.09.14.1\\_7\\_round\\_projects.zip](http://www.bsrinterreg.net/programm/_downloads/2005.09.14.1_7_round_projects.zip)

Overview of BSR INTERREG III B programme (updated 10 January 2006).

[http://www.bsrinterreg.net/programm/\\_downloads/2006.01.10.BSR\\_ir3b\\_general\\_for\\_web\\_short.ppt#3](http://www.bsrinterreg.net/programm/_downloads/2006.01.10.BSR_ir3b_general_for_web_short.ppt#3)

<sup>18</sup> Hübner, Danuta. "Building bridges over borders - co-operation across the eastern borders of the Union." SPEECH/05/774. Seminar "Cooperation across the EU's Eastern External Borderline: the Launch of the Network of Eastern External Border Regions (NEEBOR)." Brussels, 08 December 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Source: Prigranichnoje sotrudnichestvo: analiticheskii doklad [Cross-border cooperation: analytical report]. In Russian / International Forum "Development of cooperation between nongovernmental organizations in the European North: status and prospects" (15-16 September 2005). – Official site of the Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Karelia. [www.karelia-zs.ru](http://www.karelia-zs.ru)

<b>1. Barrier</b>	meetings and consultations; making of agreements	security
<b>2. Gradient</b>	joint projects; setting up permanent working groups	migration; cross-border trade
<b>3. Contact</b>	setting up a permanent joint body; implementing joint programs	culture; social contacts; economy; crossborder flows of production factors; joint investment projects
<b>4. Integration</b>	organizing a region of crossborder integration	free movement of people, goods, production factors and institutions

From an objective point of view, what is often defined as “self-isolation” of Belarus in Europe is an indication of its marginal position on the continent (which so sharply contrasts its extremely warm relations with some non-European states). No doubt, this nonsense in the center of Europe can not last forever. Moreover, developing the ideas of Christopher S. Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, a Russian researcher Andrei Makarychev emphasizes the increasing significance of “marginal” or “peripheral” territories under the impact of globalization.<sup>20</sup> In the case of Belarus, one can observe rather a reverse trend, and the absurdity of the situation where it found itself due to its own policy is clear for all to see.<sup>21</sup> In this respect, the European Neighbourhood Policy and its proposed programs of crossborder, transborder and interregional cooperation can be viewed as a promising chance that should not be ignored.

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Available at: <http://review.w-europe.org/9/1.html>*

<sup>20</sup> Makarychev A. Periferiynost', okrainnost', marginalnost'? [Peripheral, outlying, marginal?] In Russian // *Kosmopolis*. № 3(5). Autumn 2003.

<sup>21</sup> A Ukrainian researcher Vladimir Dergachev points to the dual character of the multidimensional communicative border space: its boundary character can be a strategic resource for socio-economic development or, if contact functions are lost, it turns into an unbearable burden, while the communicative nature of space is destroyed. – See: Dergachev V. A. Geopolitika. - Kiev, VIRA-P Press, 2000. P. 99.